RESPONSES OF VERTEBRATE ANIMALS TO FIRE-DRIVEN SUCCESSION IN THE TANAMI DESERT

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It has been suggested that alterations to the pattern of burning in spinifex grasslands following the departure of Aboriginal people from their lands has disadvantaged many animals. Such species may have been dependent upon a tight mosaic of regenerating and mature patches, a pattern replaced now by large wildfire-driven patches. Thus, I ask what influence the spatial pattern of burning has on the diversity and abundance of animals. Birds and reptiles were studied in feathertop spinifex in the Tanami Desert. Data are not yet fully analysed, but suggest the following:

1: Birds and reptiles respond to fire-driven succession, but the species that move into regenerating country are habitat generalists with very broad distributions.

2: Edges between mature and regenerating spinifex are of marginal significance, if any, to birds and reptiles.

3: Birds and reptiles are not more diverse or abundant in small patches.

Thus, spatial patterns of burning are not important for persistence of birds and reptiles in this environment.